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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN - FEB 11 HEARING ON RFE/RL TAX BILL

the tax committee had informed the station in a letter that the August tax audit was ordered by the security services.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: So far, RFE/RL has not been harassed in Tajikistan as it has been in neighboring countries, but the events related to the station has been obscured by a lot of "smoke." At the point when the station itself and its local Tajik bureau chief were up for re-accreditation last summer, the Government granted it. If the government wanted to shut the station down, that would have been the time to do so. As for what provoked the lawsuits from former employees last summer, a Tajik reporter points to Orion Bank chairman Hasan Asadullozoda, who allegedly took revenge against the station for reporting (inaccurately) he had been shot dead by the president's son last spring.

¶10. (SBU) Comment continued. Regarding RFE/RL contributor Abdumumin Sherhonov, the reporter who was beaten up in Kulyab in January, both he and RFE/RL's Tajik bureau chief told emboff that the fight was personal and not related to Sherhonov's reporting. (Ref B) Finally, the head of the tax committee who signed the letter threatening to confiscate equipment retired a day or two after the letter was sent and thus is no longer accountable for any consequences. It is possible the threat was a clumsy, desperate attempt by unscrupulous officials to see whether they would end up with easy cash in their pockets. Emboff will be at the February 11 hearing, which may reveal more of the government's motives. End Comment.

Jacobson